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KLUANE NATIONAL PARK

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KLUANE NATIONAL PARK

Kluane National Park (pronounced "Kloo-ah-nee"), located in the southwestern corner of the Yukon Territory, contains Canada's highest mountains, most spectacular icefields and some of North America's finest wildlife populations. The 8,500 square-mile area encompasses most of the land set aside as the Kluane Park Reserve in 1942 and the Kluane Game Sanctuary in 1943. It was declared a national park on February 22, 1972 by the Hon. Jean Chretien, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

NATURAL HISTORY

The St. Elias Mountains, among the most impressive in North America, run through the park in a southeasterly direction. Mount Logan, at 19,850 feet is Canada's highest peak. The extensive icefields of the St. Elias form one of the world's largest non-polar glacier systems. Dating back to the last Ice Age, these massive fields of snow and ice are maintained by moisture-laden Pacific air that flows over the mountains.

Another dramatic feature is the network of glaciers, that along with the icefields account for year-round snow and ice cover on more than half the park area. The Steele Glacier is an unusual surging glacier that sporadically moves at a very rapid rate. During a surging period in the late 1960's, this glacier moved downhill 1,600 feet in one month. The Kaskawulsh and Lowell glaciers are outstanding examples of the moraine-flanked glaciers typical of the area.

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Other features of geological interest include glacier-created sand dunes and dust storms. A large delta is being built in Kluane Lake by wind-blown deposits of material from the Kaskawulsh glacier.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Coniferous species such as white spruce characterize the boreal forest growth of the river valleys. In the southeastern section of the park, the vegetation is more luxuriant as a result of the climatic influence of the Pacific Ocean. Tundra characterized by lichens, dwarf birch and low shrubs occurs at altitudes of 5,000 to 6,000 feet in the northern portion of the park. Colourful Arctic flowers grow from crevices and on rocky ledges of the mountains.

Arctic grayling, lake trout, northern pike and Kokanee (land-locked salmon) are found in most of the lakes and streams.

In the Kluane area there are large populations of golden eagle and ptarmigan. The bluebird, once a common resident of southern Canada, nests in this area as well.

The world's last major unhunted bands of Dahl sheep are found here. Large numbers of moose inhabit the lower end of the park and caribou occupy the tundra uplands of the park's northern extremity. The Kluane area lies on the northern edge of mountain goat range.

Wolf and wolverine are also found as well as grizzly. The grizzlies of the Kluane area are smaller than those found elsewhere and they lead a more solitary life, rarely being seen in groups.

HUMAN HISTORY

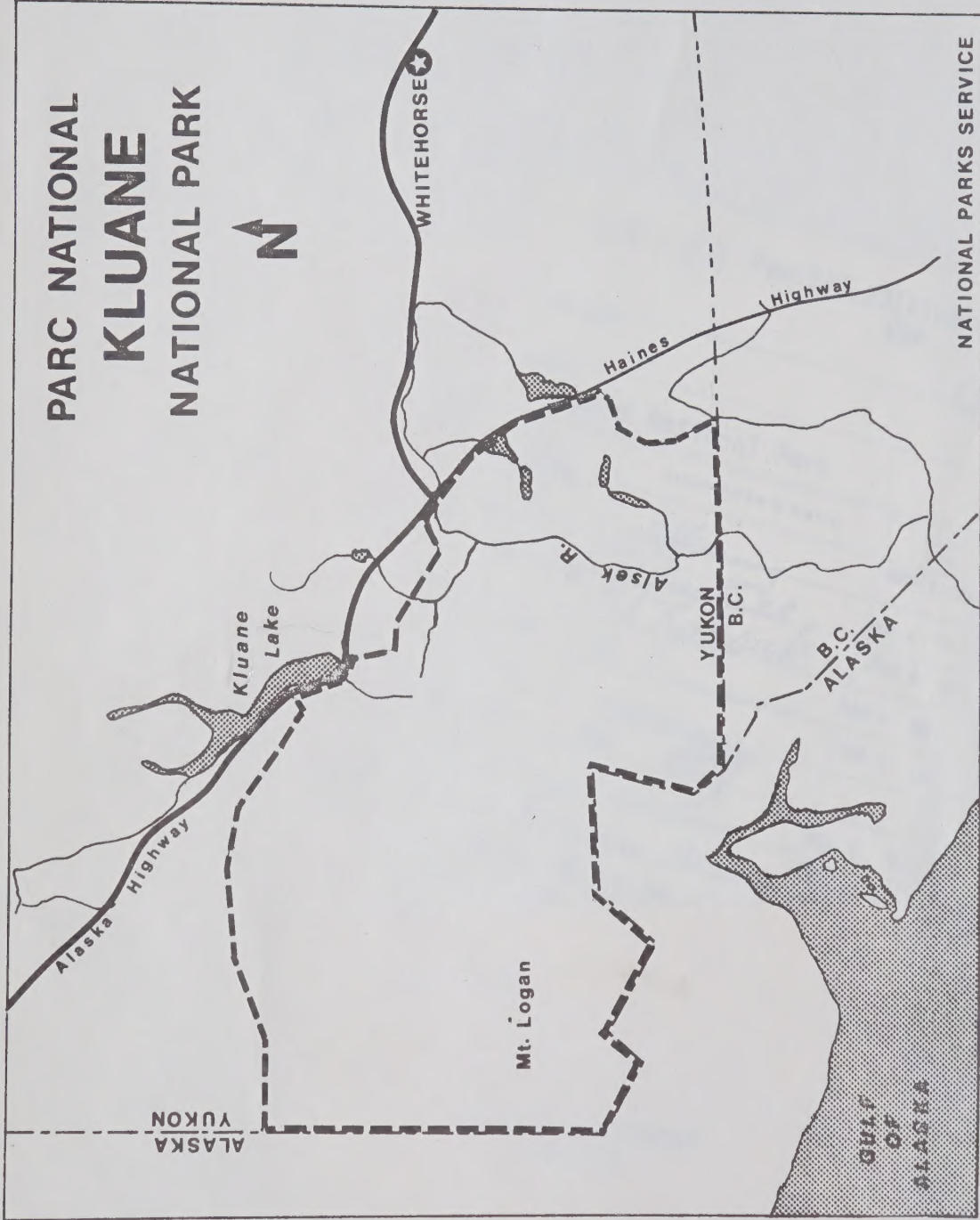
During the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, one of the minor routes for travellers from the Pacific was in the vicinity of the southeastern boundary of the park. Dalton Post, just outside the area, was a stopover camp. Prospecting occurred in other areas of the Yukon following the Klondike rush and a control post was established by the North-West Mounted Police on the south shore of Kluane Lake in 1904. In 1942 Kluane Lake was the meeting point of American and Canadian crews building the Alaska Highway.

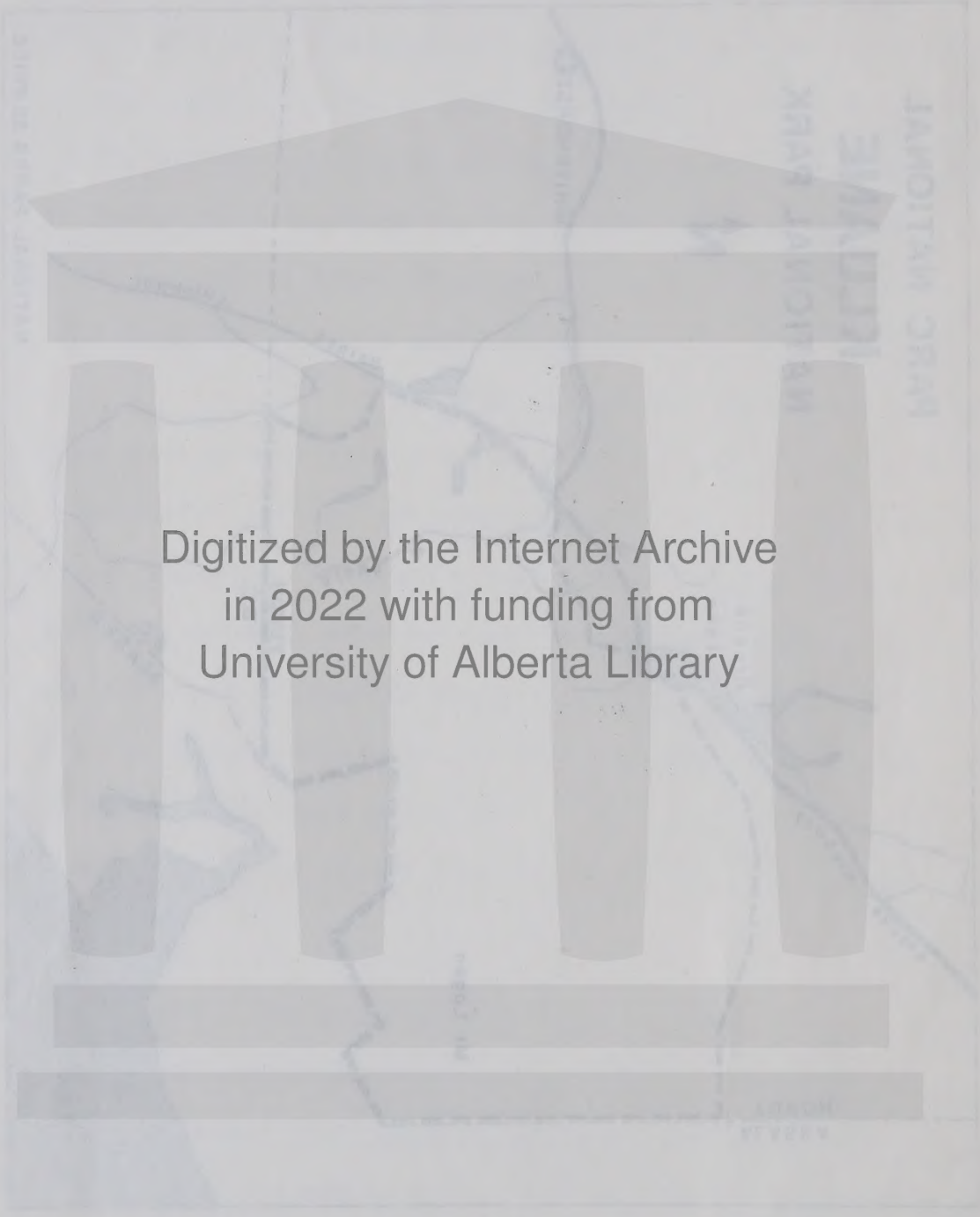
Since the late 1800's the St. Elias Mountains have been popular with mountaineers. Mount Kennedy, named for the late American president, was climbed in 1965. During Canada's centennial year, thirteen peaks were climbed and named for each Canadian province and territory. Prospecting has occurred throughout the years and the area has recently been the site of scientific studies on Dahl sheep, grizzlies and glaciers. A continuing study of the high ice-fields is carried out under the Icefield Ranges Research Project.

ACCESS

The area lies 100 miles west of Whitehorse and 1,400 road miles northwest of Edmonton. At Haines Junction, the Haines Road from the Pacific coast joins the Alaska Highway which runs 80 miles along the park's proposed northern boundary. A commercial airline makes daily flights to Whitehorse from both Vancouver and Edmonton, and there are daily flights from Fairbanks and Juneau, Alaska in summer, which are reduced to three times a week in winter.

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